

Perceptions of School Psychologists:

A Survey of Teachers from Two States

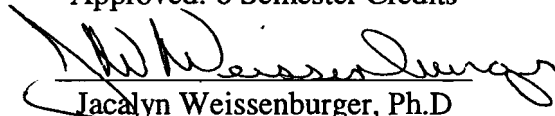
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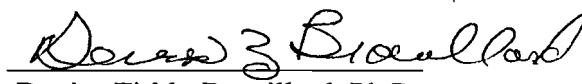
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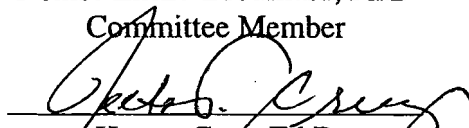
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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to examine teacher perceptions of the role of the school psychologist. Participants included a random sample of 500 teachers from Wisconsin and Iowa. Respondents ( $n = 141$ ) identified those activities engaged in by the school psychologist(s) in their building. Respondents also identified which activities they viewed as most important. The study evaluated the differences in teachers' perceptions of school psychologists who have traditional roles versus those who have broad roles.

Results of the study found that teachers in Iowa and Wisconsin are satisfied with the current roles of their school psychologists. Teachers from both states rated consultation with teachers, parents, and administration as most important job function, and consultation was also reported as the most frequent activity engaged in by the school psychologists in these two states. After consultation, teachers perceived evaluating students for special education eligibility as the next most important job function; this, too, was reported as the next most engaged in job function

by the school psychologists. Overall, teacher perceptions indicate that school psychologists engage in traditional role functions significantly more frequently than they do broad role functions. Between the two states, Wisconsin teachers' perceived their school psychologists as more often participating in referrals to outside agencies, evaluating students for special education eligibility, completing paperwork/writing reports, consulting with parents, being a participant on committees, being involved in crisis intervention, and attending professional conferences compared to the teachers in Iowa.

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## CHAPTER ONE

### INTRODUCTION

The education system's primary goal is to educate students to become responsible adults in the future. The challenge lies in creating an educational environment that effectively responds to all students. Often the academic success of students is stifled by learning disabilities, family circumstance, and/or emotional bruises. It is the educator's responsibility to tailor education to fit the academic needs of each child in order to establish a foundation for a promising future.

School psychologists have the necessary training to understand and implement programs and offer resources to others to encourage all students to succeed regardless of their strengths and weaknesses. Unfortunately, school psychologists are often not used to their fullest potential for varying reasons: lack of motivation, legislative restraints, and misconceptions of their job description.

The concepts surrounding school psychology have been around for over 100 years; however, the actual formation of school psychology as a profession began in the 1920s. In 1923, J.E. Wallace Wallin conducted research which indicated that psychological testing was being administered by untrained amateurs. Wallin suggested that more qualified individuals should replace them (Gutkin & Reynolds, 1982). Concurrently, psychologists in Chicago were assisting the legal system in understanding the needs of delinquent youth. Eventually, some of these psychologists left to specialize in academic concerns such as reading, and they were gradually integrated into the school system. At about the same time, the American Psychological Association (APA) devised standards to ensure the competency of individuals seeking to become school

psychologists. Then, in the 1970s, when P.L. 94-142, the Education of All Handicapped Children Act was under development, the need for school psychologists dramatically increased.

Currently, school psychologists' are primarily employed within school systems. With their training in psychology and education, they have the potential to address the needs of the whole child. Unfortunately, their role has frequently been narrowed to psychological testing for special education placement. Some believe that if the school psychologist role is not expanded, there will no longer be a need for them in the education system.

Farley (1996) offered suggestions on how school psychologists could expand their role. He suggested a reduction in the importance of traditional IQ testing and more of an emphasis on general education, child and adolescent health and prevention, counseling, and family psychology. Through these modifications, the role of the school psychologist could be expanded to the entire school instead of just the special education system.

School psychologists work with various educational professionals who vary in their perceptions of the usefulness or effectiveness of school psychologists. As school psychologists attempt to expand their role within the school system, they will be met with varied responses from other educational professionals, including teachers.

Of primary interest in this study are teacher perceptions of school psychologists. The majority of student referrals made to school psychologists come from teachers; because of this, it is important for school psychologists to understand how teachers perceive them and their services (Severson, Pickett, & Hetrick, 1985). Some research regarding teachers' perceptions of school psychologists suggests that teachers with less



experience have a more positive perception of school psychologists than teachers with more experience (Severson, Pickett, & Hetrick, 1985). In addition, the research suggests that teachers desire school psychologists to be a more active participant in helping students by expanding their role beyond psychological testing (Severson, Pickett, & Hetrick, 1985).

### *Statement of the Problem*

Many believe school psychologists have not been used to their full potential in the education system. Articles and studies conducted on the role of school psychologists and teachers' perceptions of their role have suggested that the school psychologist role needs to expand their services to be perceived more positively. If the school psychologist role does not broaden, school psychologists may be at risk of losing their usefulness in the education system.

### *Purpose of the Study*

Research relevant to the role of school psychology and the perceptions teachers have of the school psychologist's role is needed. The goal of the proposed study is to develop a clearer understanding of teachers' current perceptions of school psychologists in order to aid in the further development of the school psychologist's role. The main questions proposed by this study are:

1. What are teachers' perceptions of school psychologists?
2. Is there a difference in teachers' perceptions of school psychologists with a traditional role versus school psychologists who have a broader role?
3. Is there a difference in teachers' perception of the school psychologists' role by state?

### *Definition of Terms*

*School Psychologist:* Educators who have academic training in education and psychology, with an understanding of optimal teaching and learning as well as an understanding of school systems. School psychologists work in a team with parents and other educators to create an optimal environment for every child to learn (NASP, 2004).

*Perceptions:* As it relates to this study, perceptions are teacher attitudes or beliefs of school psychologists in the education system.

*Broad Role:* Time spent doing a wide variety of activities in order to aid students, their families, and other educators. These activities include, but are not limited to, individual and group counseling, consultation and collaboration, implementing behavior change and prevention programs, leading workshops, and administering psychological assessments (Abidin, 1996; Reschly, 2000; Gutkin, 1980).

*Traditional Role:* Spending a majority of time testing, writing reports, and responding to referrals for special education eligibility (Abidin, 1996; Reschly, 2000; Gutkin, 1980).

## CHAPTER TWO

### LITERATURE REVIEW

#### *Introduction*

Learning is the greatest investment we have to offer our children. Schools have the privilege and enormous responsibility to instill in children the tools to learn. Like anything in life, the more efficient a school is, the more learning can be done and the more successful children will be when they become adults. Schools can increase their efficiency in a number of areas; of particular interest to this literature review is that of school personnel, specifically school psychologists. This literature review will provide a brief history of the development of school psychology; the reasons cited for school psychologists to expand their role, and studies that have addressed other educators' attitudes toward school psychologists.

According to Reschly (2000), research completed on the role of the school psychologist suggests that although traditional roles will continue, broader roles will increasingly emerge in schools. Further, although more than half of school psychologists' time is projected to be spent with students who have disabilities or at-risk characteristics, the approach to these areas will change (Reschly). According to Reschly, less time will be spent administering psychological evaluations and more energy will be put towards problem-solving consultation, intervention-oriented assessments and direct interventions. In addition, Reschly noted that criteria for ability and achievement classification are likely to change within the next decade, as well. Once this occurs, traditional intelligence testing will change. In its place, comprehensive health services will bloom (Reschly).

The future of school psychology can not be fully appreciated unless one looks at its past. The following section will briefly describe the development of school psychology, the evolution of school psychologist's role, and study outcomes addressing how teachers and administrators perceive school psychologists.

### *A Brief History of School Psychology*

The first inclinations of school psychology began in 1896 when a teacher, Margaret T. Maguire, brought a 14-year-old boy to the University of Pennsylvania to see Lightner Witmer who investigated the boy's spelling difficulties (Gutkin & Reynolds, 1982). Following this experience, Witmer assisted many other students with slower than expected progress (Gutkin & Reynolds, 1982). Witmer described his work to the American Psychological Association (APA) in December of 1896 as follows:

1. The investigation of the phenomena of mental development in school children, as manifested more particularly in mental and moral retardation, by means of the statistical and clinical methods.
2. A psychological clinic, supplemented by a training school in the nature of a hospital school, for the treatment of all classes of children suffering from retardation or physical defects interfering with school progress.
3. The offering of practical work to those engaged in the professions of teaching and medicine, and to those interested in social work, in the observation and training of normal and retarded children.
4. The training of students for a new profession—that of psychological expert, who would find his career in connection with the school system, through the examination and treatment of mentally and morally retarded children or in

connection with the practice of medicine (as cited in Gutkin & Reynolds, 1982, p. 4-5).

Witmer's clinical practice continued to expand throughout the next 30 years and he was considered the first to develop the field of school psychology and clinical psychology as well as the first to establish a child guidance clinic (Gutkin & Reynolds, 1982; Merrell, Ervin, & Gimpel, 2006). In addition, he published the journal, *The Psychological Clinic*, to provide information and results about this new domain of psychological services.

Two years later, in 1898, the Chicago school board developed a survey about the mental and physical characteristics of children (Gutkin & Reynolds, 1982). The results of this survey indicated a need to continue investigating the mental and physical characteristics of children. Therefore, in 1899, the Child Study and Pedagogic Investigation was developed and led by Fred Smedley. With the help of his two assistants, Smedley opened a 'Psycho-physical laboratory' in April of 1900. When this laboratory first opened, children's intelligence was assessed using anthropological measurements. For example, brighter children were thought to be heavier and taller than dull children. Lung capacity endurance, strength, and visual and auditory acuity were also considered to be measures of a child's intelligence. Then, in 1902, Daniel P. MacMillan became the director of the Child Study Bureau and anthropological measurements were replaced by psychological tests. MacMillan was considered by some to be the first school psychologist (Gutkin & Reynolds, 1982).

In 1905, the birth of IQ tests began with psychologist Alfred Binet and psychiatrist Theophile Simon (Merrell, Ervin, & Gimpel, 2006). The Binet-Simon IQ scales were developed as a way to classify and sort children in Paris who were

unsuccessful in the traditional classroom and were tracked into a specialized curriculum in other settings. Stanford Universities' Lewis Terman later translated the Binet-Simon IQ Assessment into English (Merrell, Ervin, & Gimpel, 2006).

As school psychology continued to be refined, an extensive survey by J.E. Wallace Wallin took place in 1923. The survey concluded that psychological testing was done by amateurs who only had taken general courses in psychology and education, a course in testing, and a course (or read literature) about feeble minded children (Gutkin & Reynolds, 1982). Dissatisfied with his findings, Wallin stated psycho-educational diagnosticians should have three to four years of extensive clinical experience and training. Wallin listed schools he believed had more extensive training programs and concluded that it would not be long until the students from these schools would replace the amateurs.

Between 1850 and 1930, the majority of delinquent children were dropouts by the time they were adolescents (Gutkin & Reynolds, 1982). Psychologists were often used to recommend a suitable foster home for these students as well as assist the courts in understanding the cause of the delinquency and to offer ways to improve their behavior. The Juvenile Psychopathic Institute in Chicago offered their psychologists to help the courts understand delinquent children. According to Gutkin & Reynolds (1982), these psychologists contributed immensely to the development of school psychology. For example, Grace Fernald was a psychologist at this institute who eventually left to specialize in reading strategies for poor readers. August Bronner, a director of the institute, was an initial advocate for the importance of rapport when assessing a child; she

also wrote about students with average and above average intelligence who were thought to be retarded because they could not read.

The qualifications of school psychologists were determined in 1917 during an American Psychological Association (APA) meeting of 10 professionals who gathered together and concluded that a certifying committee for school psychologists should be established (Gutkin & Reynolds, 1982). This committee was later formed in 1921 and was called the Committee on Certification of Consulting Psychologists. Professionals who were accepted by this committee were able to make mental diagnoses and were given a certificate they could display in their office and be shown to the court, giving them credibility. In the 1930s, the majority of services provided to children were done in clinics outside of school settings, although there were a few professionals working in the schools. However, school psychologists within the school were largely unmonitored and their services were provided by individuals with various different trainings and titles such as consulting psychologist, psychoclinician, and psychological examiner (Merrell, Ervin, & Gimpel, 2006). Then, in 1947, the baby boom began which meant a larger amount of school children which also lead to a greater number of students with academic struggles (Merrell, Ervin, & Gimpel). Consequently, the need for school psychologists increased (Merrell, Ervin, & Gimpel). Continued need for school psychologists began in the 1970s when P.L. 94-142, the Education of All Handicapped Children Act was established (Gutkin & Reynolds). In response to this federal law, training programs educating school psychologists more than tripled and journals about school psychology began to be published (Gutkin & Reynolds).

Prior to P.L. 94-142, school psychology began to establish its identity through meetings such as at the Thayer Conference of 1954 (Fagan, 2005). At the time of the Thayer Conference, there were only one thousand school psychologists in America, and seventy percent of those individuals had a background in teaching (Fagan). Prior to the Thayer Conference, there were 75 different titles for the school psychologist (Fagan). There were only twenty-eight training programs and five doctoral programs at the time of the Thayer Conference (Fagan). Recommendations taken from this conference have influenced school psychology in the twenty first century (Fagan).

According to Fagan (2005), school psychologists are now across America with 200 training programs and 90 doctoral programs. The school psychologist to student ratio is 1:2,000 instead of 1:36,000. Fagan asserts there has been substantial growth in the amount of school psychology literature and the demand for school psychologists has increased due to the growth in special education and job responsibilities that extend beyond testing (Fagan). Recommendations from the Thayer conference provided the field of school psychology with a clearer vision (Fagan). It defined a school psychologist as:

a psychologist with training and experience in education. He uses his specialized knowledge of assessment, learning, and interpersonal relationships to assist school personnel to enrich the experience and growth of all children and to recognize and deal with exceptional children (as cited in Fagan, 2005, p. 232-233).

Recommendations from the Thayer Conference also advised that a code of ethics be established, professional development be encouraged, and each state work to provide certification for one or more levels of school psychology (Fagan). At the conference, one



area of debate centered on job role differences between doctoral level and subdoctoral level school psychologists (Fagan). Some believed that doctoral level school psychologists should supervise nondoctoral level practitioners and they should not have the title “school psychologist” but rather “psychological examiner” (Fagan). This area continues to be discussed between the American Psychologist Association (APA) and the National Association of School Psychologists (NASP) (Fagan).

Another area of debate during the Thayer Conference was whether a school psychologist should have a background in teaching (Fagan, 2005). In the end, it was determined that school psychologists needed an awareness of the school system but teaching credentials or experience were not required (Fagan). The Thayer Conference’s vision for school psychology was for it to maintain its roots with psychology while having a connection to education in America (Fagan).

Intellectual assessment has unquestionably been linked to school psychologists’ role in American education (Merrell, Ervin, & Gimpel, 2006). The development of IQ testing has greatly expanded the role of the school psychologist, but with it came the role of the psychometric-gatekeeper which has held back the movement of consultation, intervention, and prevention within the school psychologists’ role (Merrell, Ervin, & Gimpel).

There are a variety of factors that contribute to school psychologists choosing a traditional role over a broader one. One primary factor is the federal regulation of prescribed activities which emphasizes the school psychologist role in psychological testing (Reschly, 2000). Consequently, according to Reschly, school psychologists have decided they will not take on additional responsibilities if it is not required (Reschly). A

second factor is the current shortage within the field of school psychology. The number of school psychologists rose from 9, 950 in 1977/78 school year to 23, 806 in the 1996/97 school year (Reschly). But there were 495 vacant positions in the 1996/97 school year; and, each year, many positions remain unfilled. Because of this extreme need and shortage, school psychologists are often spread among many schools to conduct psychological testing, reinforcing the traditional role as the “tester” and making it more difficult for school psychologists to take on a broader role. As a result of all of these factors, psychological testing has become the traditional role of school psychologists (Reschly).

#### *The Case for a Changing Role*

The school psychologist’s role has largely been influenced by federal legislation for handicapped students (Talley & Short, 1995; Reschly, 2000). Although legislation has provided school psychologists with jobs through federal mandates, it has also limited their potential in the schools (Talley & Short, 1995). Because of federal mandates, the school psychologist’s role has centered on psychological assessments, thus excluding other services they may be qualified to provide. Recently, school psychologists have been urged to expand their role and provide a larger array of services (Gilman & Gabriel; 2004; Talley & Short, 1995). Research on the influence health has on learning and an emphasis on early intervention in the schools has resulted in opportunities for role expansion (Talley & Short, 1995). The training school psychologists have in behavioral health, child development, program evaluation, service integration, knowledge acquisition, and systems research can help schools integrate education with healthcare. In addition, the 21<sup>st</sup> century brings with it a clearer understanding of the mind as it relates to

education and learning. With a background in psychology, school psychologists have an extensive amount of knowledge pertaining to the mind that would aid schools in improving education and learning. As stated by Farley (1996):

Given the current and coming changes in education and health care, the two areas of greatest relevance to school psychology, I propose that school psychology reinvent itself as a broader discipline, formally encompassing the full range of psychological issues in education including the health care of students as well as the psychology of learning and teaching and the social life of schools (p. 32).

In addition, Farley (1996) asserted the term, school psychology, limits psychologists to the school building. He suggested that school psychology's name be changed to "educare psychology" in order to reflect their broader role as the caregiver for both the education as well as the health of each student (Farley, 1996, p. 32). Farley suggested specific modifications in the educare psychologist's job description in order to raise the position's credibility. Arguing for a reduction in the importance of traditional IQ testing because of its lack of helpfulness, Farley also questioned the validity and reliability of projective techniques and psychodynamic psychology; and, therefore, argued for their reduced or diminished use. Farley asserted educare psychology should place more of an emphasis on general education, counseling and family psychology, and child and adolescent health and prevention.

Farley (1996) is not the only one who wrote that the role of the school psychologist should change. Richard Abidin (1996) conjectured that without a broader role, school psychologists may not have a meaningful place in the education system.

Currently, the primary role of school psychologists is IQ testing; with IQ testing, school psychologists and other educators place students into various special education classes. Influential people in education suggest that IQ testing should no longer be used because there has been no documentation of enhanced learning by students who undergo these measures and because IQ testing has discriminated against minority students (Abidin). Abidin suggests that school psychologists should find an indispensable role in order to be useful to the education system. An indispensable role would require school psychologists to be cost effective as well as provide schools with evidence that their role produces beneficial outcomes. Abidin provided five strategies that would make school psychologists indispensable.

According to Abidin (1996), the school psychologists' role should be broadened to support the educational and health needs of all students and teachers, not just students in special education or those with extreme behavior problems (Abidin; Gilman & Gabriel, 2004). If school psychology became more of a developmental profession, school psychologists could play a pivotal role in the development of preventative programs in schools such as pregnancy, drug/alcohol abuse, and/or suicide prevention. Abidin asserted that an increase in school psychologists' involvement in consultation and education programs would provide teachers and parents with needed support when they are struggling with a student's behavior and/or academic success. This, in turn, may prevent a student's minor problem from becoming more severe. In addition, psychological consultation with school administrators who do not feel comfortable addressing behavioral and mental health issues would influence administrators perception of the need for school psychologists (Abidin).

Second, according to Abidin (1996), systems-oriented problem solving should replace IQ testing. Traditional intelligence testing is often used to sort children into categories with designated labels, whereas a systems-oriented model investigates all the factors that contribute to a student's success, such as: a) family/community influences, b) the current instructional program, and c) how the student is presently coping. This approach would address the various influences affecting the student's performance instead of using the same intervention on students with various success barriers, which is often typical of the sorting and labeling approach (Abidin).

Abidin's (1996) third strategy would be to restructure special education programs to eliminate the necessity of labeling students and reduce special education's cost. This strategy would offer more flexibility to help students with academic challenges. Abidin stated that most special education students (except students with severe disabilities) are offered the same educational approach regardless of their label. In lieu of this, Abidin suggested we open the doors of special education so that students can easily enter and exit its services, making special education available to all students, thus making special education a support for the entire school population. Furthermore, Abidin's approach would eliminate the need for labels and it would not discriminate against students. The school psychologist's new role would be to help create and facilitate programs focused on individualized problem solving.

Fourth, according to Abidin (1996), school psychologists need to include parents in their students' academic lives. The vast majority of parents (i.e., 80-90%) do not have their children in special education; therefore, it is unlikely that they will come in contact with a school psychologist. Abidin asserted it essential for this lack of access to change

because parents are a major component of what is considered indispensable in education; because of this, the school psychologist's role should be expanded so that all parents can benefit from resources provided by their school psychologist. Furthermore, parents who do meet the school psychologist often do not develop a relationship with the psychologist because of the environment in which they meet. Parents whose children are eligible for special education typically meet the school psychologist during the Individual Education Plan (IEP) conference when the school psychologist reports the results of the IQ test. Often, no further contact with the school psychologists occurs. As Abidin stated:

In this process, the psychologist's role is likely to be seen by the parent, at best as mysterious, and at worst as a collaborator in a *railroad job*. This team approach is a costly, time consuming procedure whose validity has never been demonstrated in terms of enhanced education outcomes. (Abidin, 1996, p. 47)

In order to successfully help students, school psychologists need to directly interact with parents to create interventions that link the student's home life to their academic life (Abidin, 1996). Fostering this kind of relationship will enable parents to see the school psychologists as valuable contributor to their childrens' educational success.

Last, according to Abidin (1996), school psychologists need to evaluate psychological interventions as well as the educational process. Empirical investigations are linked to the psychology profession; thus, school psychologists are in a position to deliver evidence as to the effectiveness of intervention. Research on the effectiveness of services students are given is essential in order to understand which programs are

effective and which programs require modification in order to enhance success in student learning (Abidin).

Traditionally, school psychologists have been limited to psychological assessments that restrict them to activities tied to activities within special education categorization (Abidin, 1996). According to Abidin (1996), the education system needs school psychologists to expand their role in order to make the education of all students more successful. Through expanding their role, school psychologists would become a valuable resource to special and general education parents, teachers and students (Abidin, 1996; Farley, 1996; Gilman & Gabriel, 2004; Talley & Short, 1995).

The Greeley-Evans Public School is a perfect example of a district that decided to broaden the role of their school psychologists resulting in a positive outcome (Nelson, Hoover, Young, Obrzut, D'Amato, Copeland, 2006). According to Nelson (2006), mental health services had been fragmented in the Greeley-Evans Public School with itinerant school psychologists and social workers working between four to six buildings. With this design, most school buildings were receiving two days of mental health services each week. Then, a new position was created where each elementary school was provided with a mental health professional called a "School Community Facilitator" or SCF (Nelson et al., 2006, p. 449). The SCF fulfilled the responsibilities of school social worker, guidance counselor, and school psychologist. The minimal requirement for a mental health professional to become a SCF was to have an Educational Specialist Degree and be licensed as a school psychologist. According to Nelson, the mental health services provided by the SCF were broken down into primary prevention, secondary prevention and the integration of mental health services with other services. Common roles of the

school psychologist in Greeley-Evans School District were: social problem solving activities (such as conflict resolution and mentoring programs), preventative programs (such as a pre-referral team), individual counseling, divorce/family change groups and mental health services for students with significant emotional and behavioral concerns. When Greeley-Evans Public School School Psychologists were compared to the national sample done by Stinnett, Haney, and Oehler-Stinnett in 1994 (as cited in Nelson et al., 2006), they did more intervention services (41%) than the national sample (19%) and less assessments (15% compared to 51%) (Nelson et al., 2006). In addition, schools from neighboring districts had an increase in their need for special education by 23%, while Greeley-Evans Public School only went up by 5%. Students identified with an emotional disturbance decreased at Greeley Evans School District as well (2.1% to 1.4%). One of the indicators for the success of this new model was the decrease in special education. This perceived success may be a result of having a full-time school psychologist who spent a considerable amount of time on intervention and prevention.

To better understand where the school psychologist's role expansion should begin, teachers' perceptions have been investigated. Because of their identification as key stakeholders with influence on the school psychologist's role expansion, teacher perceptions are critical (Peterson, Waldron & Paulson, 1998; Gilman & Medway, 2007). The following section reviews studies focused on teachers' perceptions of school psychologists in order to understand where role expansion is most need.

#### *Teacher and Administrator Perceptions of School Psychologists*

The perception of school psychologists by other education professionals has been suggested to impact the role of school psychologists (Gilmore & Chandy, 1973).



Specifically, perceptions affect school psychologists' training and qualifications, the organization of psychological services, to whom and the type of referrals made, and the procedures used in diagnosis and treatment. Several previous studies (Ford & Migles, 1979; Gilman & Medway, 2007; Gilmore & Chandy, 1973; Severson, Pickett, & Hetrick, 1985) looked at the perceptions of school psychologists by other school personnel.

Historically, principals' views on the role of school psychologists has often been one of the most influential factors in deciding what role school psychologists play in schools (Hartshorne & Johnson, 1985; Abidin, 1996). As an example, one study surveyed 203 principals' perceptions of school psychologists in the North Central Association of Secondary Schools (Hartshorne, & Johnson, 1985). The study asked the principals to rank school psychologists' responsibilities in ten areas. The ten areas were ranked twice, once for the time ideally spent, and once for the time that was actually spent by the school psychologist. Principals ranked the ten ideal items in the following order (from most ideal to least ideal): psychological testing, counseling, consultation with staff, consultation with parents, staffing, consultation with administrators, case follow-up, program development, in-service training, and research. The actual time spent in each of these ten items was ranked as follows (from most time to least time): psychological testing, staffings, consultation with staff, consultation with parents, counseling, consultation with administrators, case follow-up, program development, in-service training, and lastly research. The results of the Hartshorne and Johnson study indicated that "counseling with students" would ideally switch with "staffing for special education," thereby ranking "counseling with students" as number two instead of number five in actual time spent (Hartshorne & Johnson, 1985, p. 243). This study also found

that nonassessment activities such as counseling, the development of mental health programs, in-service training, and consultation with parents received higher ideal rankings than actual time rankings. The opposite was true with assessment-related practices such as staffings, case follow-up meetings, and testing. In addition to ranking the ten areas, principals were asked to report the four main factors that influenced how they ranked the ten areas. The factors were: training, personality, circumstances, and special education regulations. Training most affected the rankings of psychological testing, program development, and research. Personality influenced the rankings of counseling, consultation with parents, staff and administrators and in-service training. The rankings of counseling, consultation with administration, program development, and research were most influenced by circumstances. Lastly, special education regulations most influenced the rankings of psychological testing, staffings, and follow-up meetings. In conclusion, the results of this 1980s study indicated that, on average, principals were satisfied with the role of the school psychologist in the schools with the exception of the amount of time devoted to counseling. According to the researchers, possible explanations for school psychologists' lack of time devoted to counseling may have been due to their lack of training in counseling and/or the amount of time school psychologists needed to spend on special education activities because of mandated laws.

Of particular interest are teachers' perceptions of school psychologists. The majority of student referrals to school psychologists come from teachers; because of this, it is important for school psychologists to understand how teachers perceive them and their services (Severson, Pickett, & Hetrick, 1985). The view of school psychologists by teachers has been studied in a variety of ways, these include: a) role function, b)

helpfulness, and c) competency and education of school psychologists (Gilmore & Chandy, 1973; Gilman & Medway, 2007; Peterson, Waldron & Medway, 1998).

Styles (1965) was one of the first to examine of teachers' perceptions of the role of school psychologists. In 1963, Styles created and mailed a questionnaire to twenty-eight schools in the Ohio school system. The questionnaire had five parts: a) teachers' knowledge of school psychologists' training, b) school psychologists' training relative to training in other areas of psychology and education, c) teachers' perception of how competent school psychologists' were to assist in specific areas, d) school psychologists' competency with various childhood problems and e) teachers' perception of what personality attributes were needed as a school psychologist. The return rate of this questionnaire was 52.3 percent, with a participation total of 459 teachers. One interesting outcome of this study suggested that teachers perceived school psychologists to be more competent in aiding students with emotional difficulties than their levels of preparation. When teachers were asked about school psychologists' competency in specific areas, the following results were found: a) 68% of teachers believed school psychologists were fully qualified to explain the child's abilities to parents, b) 67% of teachers believed school psychologists were qualified to hold training workshops for teachers about group intelligence tests, c) 68% of teachers believed that school psychologists were qualified to instruct teachers on how to manage their classroom in only some cases, and d) teachers' opinions were divided evenly among school psychologists ability to "serve on curriculum-planning committees," "determine whether a particular child could be labeled 'psychotic'," and their ability to "lead extended psycho-therapy with students" (Styles, 1965 p. 26). In addition, the questionnaire asked teachers to explain the qualities an

individual should have if pursuing a career as a school psychologist. The results indicated that teachers believed individuals interested in school psychology should have a love for students/people, objectivity and fairness, sensitivity when talking with others, a reassuring/pleasing manner, self-composure, and a consistent or even temperament. Overall, the outcome of this study suggested that teachers had a fairly accurate perception of school psychologists in the given time frame.

Gilmore and Chandy (1973) studied 33 teachers' perceptions of school psychologists and broke down these perceptions based on teachers' years of experience. The main variable separating experienced teachers from less experienced teachers was the amount of contact with school psychologists. Teachers with the most experience expected school psychologists to work with them to create and implement treatments. Experienced teachers also expected school psychologists to conduct treatments independently. In addition, teachers who worked with school psychologists were less likely to perceive them as reviewing cumulative records, doing classroom observations and consulting with teachers and parents when compared to teachers who had no contact with school psychologists. As a whole, teachers who had no experience with school psychologists had a more positive view of school psychologists than those who had interacted with school psychologists. In addition, teachers desired school psychologists to become more involved in student concerns. These included: low achievement, students with behavioral and emotional concerns and students with low ability. Interestingly, teachers believed that the student's problem(s) should be moderately severe before seeking assistance from a school psychologist. When asked about the school psychologist's role, teachers in the Gilmore and Chandy study indicated that the school

psychologist's primary role was to administer psychological tests. In addition, these teachers stated a variety of areas in which school psychologists could improve. These areas of improvement included: a faster referral response and practical recommendations to be implemented by the psychologist. With regards to children, school psychologists were believed to better understand children's abilities and emotional development than the "average teacher," however, school psychologists knew less about teaching in general and about classroom management.

Employment issues were also a concern by teachers in the Gilmore and Chandy (1973) study. Teachers desired a full-time school psychologist at their school who showed long-term and consistent involvement. Twenty-five percent of teachers wanted an increase in contact with a school psychologist and eighteen percent of teachers wanted parent/psychologist contact to increase. However, the results of the Gilmore and Chandy study need to be interpreted with caution due to the small sample size and the region (the respondents were teaching in two schools). Caution is warranted in generalizing the results of the study to all teachers based on such a small sample. Additionally, the results were gathered through structured interviews by the lead researcher, and this form of data collection is subject to extraneous variables that may have affected the teachers' responses. Finally, the study was conducted in 1973, when the role of most school psychologists was almost exclusively testing oriented.

Ford and Migles (1979) investigated 150 teachers' perceptions of school psychologists based on years of experience, grade and subject taught, gender, and "open education" methods. Surveyed teachers were from low SES, mainly minority schools in De La Warr School District in New Castle, Delaware. Overall, the teachers in this study

found screening students to be placed into special education as the most important role of the school psychologist. Psychodiagnostic testing, counseling students and remedial case consultation were also listed as important duties of the school psychologist in the eyes of the teachers surveyed. In contrast, serving as a group facilitator, an in-service trainer for teachers, a consultant for parent conferences and a parent counselor was seen as less important. In addition, high school teachers rated counseling students, teacher consultation on parent conferences, and remedial case consultation by school psychologists as less important. Also, teachers who used "open education" methods wanted school psychologists to take a broader or active role in the schools compared to teachers who did not use an "open education" approach. Gender, years of experience, and teaching specialty had no significance on the teachers' perceptions of school psychologists. In conclusion, the outcome of the Ford and Migles study suggested two important implications for school psychology service delivery: a) services (such as diagnostic testing and screenings) offered by school psychologists that directly relieve problematic circumstances are highly valued by teachers; b) teachers do not want school psychologists frequently involved in educational programming, parent consultation, training and other areas considered by the teacher to be in "his/her domain." One implication from this study suggests, school psychologists should be able to carry out a variety of different role functions and tailor their services to each teacher's teaching style. Similar to the limitations of the other studies, however, Ford and Migles study may have a biased sample considering the low response rate. In addition, this study was conducted in the 1970s and only included one school district; therefore, the results should only be generalized to school districts with similar demographics during the same era.

Consultation is an area of service that extends beyond the school psychologists' traditional role. Gutkin (1980) investigated teachers' perceptions of school psychology consultative services. Twelve school psychology graduate students were placed in 12 Midwest schools of varying community size. Each consultant worked two half days per week for fourteen weeks following the Meyers (1973) and Williams (1972) approach to consultative services. In this approach, the consultant provided indirect services to the student through teacher consultation; they met with the teacher face to face, did not test, and provided consultative services with the understanding that the teacher could reject any ideas generated through their meetings. At the end of the study, each teacher was given a four question survey in which 70% were returned. Results of the survey revealed that the teachers' perception of the consultative services were positive. Eighty-four percent of the consultees valued having a psychological consultant on staff. Sixty-nine percent of consultees found consultative services to be more valuable than school psychologists' traditional testing role. Ninety-six percent of consultees agreed that it was important for them to participate in intervention plans for their students. Eighty-one percent of the consultees believed that working with a consultant improved their own professional skills. Interestingly, the community size did not impact the teachers' perception of the consultation services provided by the consultants, suggesting that school psychology consultative services have a wide appeal and need.

Severson, Pickett, and Hetrick (1985) split teachers into experienced ( $n = 181$ ) and preservice ( $n = 189$ ) groups with a survey instrument adapted from Styles' 1965 study. The survey included the following categories; a) effectiveness b) level of training c) qualifications for tasks, and d) usefulness in specific duties. The results of this study

indicated that 84% of experienced teachers likened school psychologists to clinical psychologists. When preservice and experienced teachers were compared, experienced teachers found school psychologists more effective with culturally deprived and physically handicapped students. In addition, experienced teachers believed school psychologists were more qualified to train teachers in administration of group intelligence tests, consult with teachers about difficulties in their classroom, refer them to others for further help, facilitate conferences to interpret a student's ability, and recommend specific school programming for students. Only 22% of teachers believed school psychologists were completely competent to advise teachers on matters of discipline. Severson and colleagues were concerned about the low percentage of teachers who perceived school psychologists as competent to assist with discipline issues because discipline is a common referral reason. In contrast, the preservice group believed school psychologists were more qualified to advise teachers on discipline problems in the classroom and on school psychologists' ability to serve on curriculum committees. When teachers were asked to rate the school psychologists' usefulness, results indicated they perceived school psychologists to be most helpful in consultation with teachers about students and least useful in providing individual and group counseling services. This 1980s study found that an important factor motivating teachers' perceptions of school psychologists was the amount of contact teachers had with school psychologists. However, the study had several limitations which should be considered when evaluating the study's results. First, the questionnaire was brief, making findings limited to the questions asked. Secondly, some of the questionnaires were not completely filled out, suggesting that the respondents may have needed clarification on some of the questions.



Finally, the limited sample (teachers from only one school district) limited the generalizability of the results.

Teachers' perceptions of school psychology services continue to be an important area of study in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Gilman and Gabriel (2004) conducted a study comparing administrator (N = 90) and teacher (N = 533) perceptions of school psychologists' role and function. These perceptions were then compared to the school psychologists' (N = 87) responses within their school district. Results indicated that administration knew significantly more about the practice of school psychology than the teachers.

Administration also reported a significantly higher amount of satisfaction with school psychological services than the teachers. However, school psychologists reported the lowest amount of job satisfaction. Teachers rated school psychologists' helpfulness to educators and children significantly lower than administrators did, regardless of their years of experience. Both administrators and school psychologists reported that school psychologists should be consulted when a problem was noticeable, but teachers reported that a school psychologist should be consulted only when the problem is severe. Gilman and Gabriel (2004) concluded that the difference between administrators and teachers may suggest that administrators and school psychologists endorse a "primary prevention model of mental health" and that the severity of the student concern may contribute to school psychologists' lower job satisfaction (p. 8). Another possible reason for lower job satisfaction by school psychologists is that while administrators and teachers wanted school psychologists to provide more assessment and consultation, school psychologists wanted those responsibilities to remain the same. Both teachers and school psychologists agreed that school psychologists should become more involved in group or individual

counseling services and work with general education teachers. However, administrators believed that these areas should remain the same. The limitations of this study were; a) limited generalizability due to it being a pilot study with a small amount of school psychologists and administrators; b) no stratification of the sample was done; c) no school districts from the Northeast part of the United States were included.

Gilman and Medway (2007) conducted a recent study comparing general education teachers' and special education teachers' perceptions of school psychologists. Their study included one thousand five hundred thirty-three participants from eight school districts in four states; Georgia, Nebraska, Florida, and Arizona. In addition to the teacher comparison, Gilman and Medway also compared how these two groups of teachers viewed school psychologists compared to guidance counselors. Gilman and Medway found that special education teachers perceived school psychological services as more useful than general education teachers. Consequently, special education teachers also requested school psychological services more often than the general education teachers in the study. Consistent with these findings, special education teachers also believed school psychological services were more helpful to students than general education teachers. In addition, special education teachers requested school psychologists to provide assessments for students more often than general education teachers did and also felt that school psychologists' recommendations were more helpful. When school psychologists were compared to guidance counselors, guidance counselors were perceived as significantly more effective by general education teachers. Both general education teachers and special teachers rated school psychologists higher in assessment than the teachers rated guidance counselors. However, guidance counselors were rated as

high by both teacher groups in most other areas, including; individual and group counseling, crisis intervention, in-service training and curriculum development. Gilman and Medway concluded three primary findings from their study: a) the more frequently a teacher came in contact with the school psychologist, the greater their understanding and appreciation for them; b) the more responsible the teacher felt towards information provided by the school psychologist (e.g., special education teachers), the more valuable the school psychologist was perceived; c) both special education teachers and general education teachers perceived school psychologists to have a role limited to assessment, and behavioral or academic consultation. The limitations of Gilman and Medway's study included; a) a limited geographic region as most of the sample was collected from the southern portion of the United States; b) method bias may have been a factor as most of the districts in the study were picked by the researchers based on their familiarity with them and; c) limited psychometric validity due to analyses on responses.

### *Summary*

The results of these previous studies suggest that school psychologists would be perceived as more helpful by teachers if their services expanded to include: a) more consultative services; b) more time implementing and monitoring the interventions they develop; c) engaged more in individual and group counseling services. Research design factors also need to be considered when reviewing these studies. As discussed prior, limited samples and variable response rates in the studies may have resulted in bias; therefore, caution is warranted when generalizing the results of these studies (Ford & Migles, 1979). In addition, external variables such as the amount of contact teachers had with school psychologists was not monitored on most of the studies (Abel & Burke,

1985); but, as seen in the study done by Severson, Pickett, and Hetrick (1985), the teachers' amount of contact with school psychologists can significantly impact teachers' perceptions of school psychologists.

## CHAPTER THREE

### METHODOLOGY

#### *Introduction*

This chapter will discuss the methodology of the study that examined teachers' perceptions of school psychologists. This chapter will include a description of the participants, the survey used, and the procedures employed. A description of the procedures used to analyze the data will also be included.

#### *Subjects*

A random sample of 250 teachers from Iowa and 250 teachers from Wisconsin were surveyed to gain their perceptions of school psychology service delivery. Teachers from Iowa were chosen because they have been at the forefront in the expansion of the school psychologists' role due to their implementation of the Renewed Service Delivery in the 1980s and their current use of the Response to Intervention Model to identify children with learning disabilities. A random selection of all Iowa public school teachers was obtained from the Iowa Department of Education from the Chief, Bureau of Planning, Research and Evaluation Department. Teachers from Wisconsin also were chosen as participants as this was the state of greatest interest by this researcher. In addition, Wisconsin schools are at the beginning stages of implementing the Response to Intervention Model in their schools; and, therefore, their school psychologists were perceived to have a more traditional role compared to Iowa at the time of the survey. A random selection of all Wisconsin teachers was obtained from the public school teachers excel spreadsheet located within the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction

Webpage. Subject characteristics and demographic information can be seen in Appendix D, Table D10.

### *Instrumentation*

A three page questionnaire was created to obtain teachers' perceptions of the role of school psychologist. The first two pages consisted of a list of twenty-eight responsibilities school psychologists are known to perform at a school. On the first page, the teacher was asked which responsibilities, in their experience, were engaged in by the school psychologist at their schools. On the second page, the teacher was asked to rate the same twenty-eight responsibilities on a five point Likert scale (with one equaling "not important" and with five equaling "highly important"). The third page consisted of items designed to gather demographic information (a copy of the questionnaire is included in Appendix A).

### *Procedures*

Five hundred surveys were mailed to teachers in Iowa and Wisconsin in the December of 2006. The five hundred randomly selected teachers were mailed the brief questionnaire with a cover letter. The cover letter introduced the study and emphasized the importance of their participation (please refer to Appendix A for copies of the cover and follow-up letters). Each envelope was assigned a numeric code to allow for follow-up mailings to the non-responders of the survey. Once all data was collected, the envelopes were destroyed to protect the anonymity of the respondents.

### *Analysis*

Data was analyzed using descriptive statistics such as frequency counts, means and percentages. Tests of significance (i.e., *t* test and Pearson Chi-Square analyses) were

completed to examine group differences. A probability value of .05 was used to determine statistical significance between item and group values.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### RESULTS

#### *Introduction*

The purpose of this study was to gain a clearer understanding of teachers' perceptions of school psychologists. The study was done to determine whether there was a difference in teacher perceptions based on region and the type of services the school psychologist provided. A survey was mailed to 500 teachers in Wisconsin and Iowa in order to answer the three research questions. Results will follow according to each research question.

#### *Research Question 1: What are teachers' perceptions of school psychologists?*

Items were rank ordered and paired sample *t* tests were completed to come up with a list of top, bottom, most important, and least important activities engaged in by the school psychologists in this two state region. Results indicated that the school psychologists were most likely to provide activities that were consistent with what the teacher's perceived as most important. In rank order, the top four activities engaged in by school psychologists were perceived to be: a) consulting with administration, b) consulting with teachers, c) consulting with parents, d) and evaluating students for special education eligibility. In rank order, the top four activities perceived to be the most important were: a) consulting with teachers, b) consulting with parents, c) consulting with administration, and d) evaluating students for special education eligibility. Specific percentages and mean ratings for the top four activities are included in Appendix B, Tables B1 and B2.



Results also indicated that teachers perceived that the school psychologists in their schools were least likely to provide services that were least valued by the teachers in this survey group. In rank order from least likely to more likely, the bottom five activities performed by school psychologists were perceived to be: a) developing curriculum, b) assessing English language learners, c) evaluating the effectiveness of academic programs, and d) conducting research. In rank order from least important to more important were: a) developing curriculum, b) attending extracurricular events, c) evaluating the effectiveness of academic programs, d) conducting research, and e) assessing English language learners. Specific percentages and mean ratings for the bottom four activities are included in Appendix B, Tables B3 and B4.

*Research Question 2: Is there a difference in teachers' perceptions of school psychologists with a traditional role verses school psychologists who have a broad role?*

Traditional verses nontraditional (or broad role) activities were identified based on previous information gathered by this researcher. Traditional role activities included: a) evaluates students for special education eligibility, b) completes paperwork/writes reports, c) participates on pre-referral team, e) develops Individual Education Plan goals, f) case manages students with Individual Education Plans, and g) case manages students with 504 plans. Nontraditional or broad role activities were identified as: a) consults with administration, b) consults with teachers, c) consults with parents, d) conducts mental health screenings, e) provides crisis intervention services, f) develops/implements Behavioral Intervention Plans, g) provides individual counseling services, h) develops/designs academic interventions, i) provides group counseling services, j) conducts home visits, and k) provides social skills training.

Results of the matched paired  $t$  tests indicated that teachers believed school psychologists were more likely to engage in traditional activities rather than broad role activities ( $t(140) = -2.75, n = .007$ ). However, no statistically significant difference was found in the teachers' perceptions of the importance of traditional activities as compared to the broad role activities ( $t(137) = .96, n = .340$ ).

*Research Question 3: Is there a difference in teachers' perception of the school psychologists' role by state (Wisconsin vs. Iowa)?*

The data set was split by the state in which the teacher taught and then the frequencies of teachers' responses were ranked. Results indicated that the top four and bottom four activities engaged in by school psychologists were the same between Wisconsin and Iowa. The top four activities were, a) consults with administrators, b) consults with teachers, c) consults with parents, and d) evaluates students for special education eligibility. Although there were some differences in their ranked order, the bottom four activities were, a) evaluates the effectiveness of academic programs, b) conducts research, c) assesses English language learners; d) and develops curriculum (refer to Tables See Tables C5 and C6 in Appendix C).

The frequency of teachers' responses was also similar between the two states when teachers' rated the importance of school psychologists' top three activities and bottom five activities. The top three most important activities were: a) consults with teachers, b) consults with parents, and c) consults with administrators. The five least important activities were: a) assesses English language learners, b) conducts research, c) evaluates the effectiveness of academic programs, d) attends extracurricular events, and e) develops curriculum (refer to Tables C7 and C8 in Appendix C for bottom activities).

A significant difference was found between the teachers in Wisconsin and Iowa when using the Pearson Chi-Square Analyses on the following factors: a) completes paperwork/writes reports (78% versus 57%), b) evaluates students for special education eligibility (88% versus 75%), c) consults with parents (92% versus 75%), d) participates on school committees teams (59% versus 37%), e) provides crisis intervention services (62% versus 40%), f) refers students/families to outside agencies (77% versus 55%), and g) attends professional conferences (73% versus 48%). On each item, teachers in Wisconsin perceived their school psychologist as more likely to provide the above services than the teachers in Iowa (refer to Table C9 in Appendix C for Pearson Chi-Square statistics).

## CHAPTER FIVE

### SUMMARY AND DISCUSSION

#### *Introduction*

This chapter identifies important research findings from this study. Next it addresses the limitations of this study and then concludes with implications for future research and practice in the field of school psychology. A summary of the current study concludes the chapter.

#### *Important Research Findings*

Results of the survey indicate that teachers' perceptions of the most important school psychology activities match the services provided by school psychologists in Iowa and Wisconsin. Further, findings indicate teachers believed that the school psychologists in these two states were not likely to engage in activities viewed as unimportant by the teachers in this sample. These findings are encouraging, as teachers are important allies in the schools (Benson & Hughes, 1985).

Throughout the literature review, consultation was found to be an important ingredient in the expansion of the school psychologists' role (Abidin, 1996; Gilman & Gabriel, 2004; Gutkin, 1980). In this study, consultation was considered a nontraditional role that was highly valued by teachers and perceived by them to be the most frequent activity engaged in by their school psychologists. In past research, school psychologists desired to have more time for consultation (Gilman & Gabriel, 2004). This study found that this desire has been fulfilled in Wisconsin and Iowa.

Surprisingly, individual and group counseling services were not perceived to be among the top four most performed or most important activities by the teachers in Iowa

or Wisconsin. These results contradict the findings of Gilman and Gabriel (2004) which suggested that teachers believe that school psychologists should become more involved in the areas of individual and group counseling. Regional differences may account for this discrepancy.

Results of the assessment also indicate that school psychologists are more likely to engage in traditional role activities, as defined by this researcher, rather than broad role functions. This finding is consistent with Merrell, Ervin and Gimpel (2006) who explained that the school psychologists' purpose has been tailored to special education job duties instead of broader role functions dealing with prevention, intervention, and consultation.

Between the two states, Wisconsin teachers perceived their school psychologists were more likely to participate in eight activities compared to the Iowa sample. These activities included: referrals to outside agencies, evaluations for special education eligibility, paperwork/writing reports, consulting with parents, being a participant on committees, being involved in crisis intervention, and attending professional conferences. These activities are a blend of traditional and nontraditional services provided by school psychologists. Results suggest that Wisconsin school psychologists are more likely to provide a larger array of services. Perhaps this difference may be a result of smaller student to school psychologist ratios in Wisconsin which would increase teachers' knowledge of school psychological services and provide school psychologists with the abilities to provide a wider range of services for students.

### *Limitations of the Study*

The small response rate (28%) may have biased the outcome of this study making

it more difficult to generalize the information to all teachers in Iowa and Wisconsin. The 72% who did not respond may have chosen to not respond for a specific reason dealing with their perception of the school psychologists' role. In addition, the study took place in two Midwestern states; this limits the generalizability of the results to other sections of United States due to varying student needs and populations more prevalent in other regions. Another limitation of this survey was the validity and reliability of the study as it was not statistically evaluated to ensure that the questionnaire did accurately measure teachers' perceptions of school psychologists. Lastly, the researcher was not able to control for the failure that the school psychologists' roles are not likely to be completely pure (i.e., purely traditional or nontraditional), but are more likely to encompass aspects of both roles (i.e., traditional and broad).

#### *Implications for Future Research*

Results of this study indicate several avenues to explore within the service role of school psychology. A clearer understanding of current teacher perceptions of school psychologists in other parts of the United States is needed. More recent studies addressing school psychologists' perception of their role within education including their level of motivation towards fulfilling a broader role would also be helpful. Input by school counselors and parents regarding the school psychologists' role within the educational system would also provide useful information for future direction in the field.

#### *Implications for Practice*

Results of the study indicate that Wisconsin school psychologists are more likely to engage in referrals to outside agencies, conduct evaluations for special education eligibility, complete paperwork/write reports, consult with parents, participate on school

committees, provide crisis intervention services, and attend professional conferences compared to school psychologists in Iowa. These findings may assist school psychologists in choosing between Iowa and Wisconsin for employment. The current outcomes of the study may also be used by school psychologists to determine what job functions are valued and which areas are perceived to be unimportant by teachers. For example, consultation with teachers, parents, and administration was perceived by teachers in both Iowa and Wisconsin to be the most important aspects of the school psychologists' job. However, developing curriculum and participating in extracurricular events were not.

These results have implications for training institutions, as well. School psychology programs should continue to teach consultation skills because the need for these services in the schools studied was great. School psychology programs should also continue to teach skills needed to evaluate students for special education eligibility. Results of the study also suggest that school psychology programs may want to place less of an emphasis on curriculum development and evaluation or research, as these were skills not found to be important or engaged in by school psychologists in the region.

### *Summary*

Although much has been written about the role of the school psychologists and needed future directions in the field, a clearer understanding of teachers' perceptions of school psychologists was needed to facilitate further development of the school psychologist's role. To answer this need, this study examined teacher perceptions of the role of the school psychologist. Participants included a random sample of 500 teachers from Wisconsin and Iowa. Respondents ( $n = 141$ , 28.2%) identified those activities

engaged in by the school psychologist(s) in their building. Respondents also identified which activities they viewed as most important.

Results of the study imply that teachers in Iowa and Wisconsin were satisfied with the services provided by their school psychologists. Teachers from both states rated consultation with teachers, parents, and administrators among as the top four most important services provided by their school psychologists. Consultation with others was also reported as an activity school psychologists engaged in the most. After consultation, teachers perceived evaluating students for special education eligibility as the next most important job function; this, too, was reported as the next most engaged in job function by school psychologists.

Overall, teacher perceptions suggest that school psychologists engage in traditional role functions significantly more frequently than broad role functions like counseling, conducting mental health screenings, providing crisis intervention, and developing/implementing behavior intervention plans. Between the two states, Wisconsin teachers' perceived their school psychologists as more likely to participate in making referrals to outside agencies, conducting evaluations for special education eligibility, completing paperwork/writing reports, consulting with parents, being a participant on committees, being involved in crisis intervention, and attending professional conferences.



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## Appendix A: Teachers' Perception of the Role of School Psychologist Letters and Survey

December, 2006

Dear Teacher:

We are writing to request your participation in a survey of the perceptions of teachers regarding the role and function of school psychologists. You have been randomly selected to participate in this university study, and the information you provide will help university trainers become further acquainted with the needs of teachers regarding the service delivery of school psychologists.

While your participation in this research is entirely voluntary, we hope that you will choose to participate in this study. Although much has been written regarding the role and function of school psychologists, little information has been solicited from teachers. The survey will take approximately 10 minutes to complete, and a self-addressed envelope is provided. Your participation in the study will be kept strictly confidential, and data will be reported on a group basis only. A coding system will be done to allow for follow-up surveys, but the coding information will be destroyed after the follow-up surveys are mailed.

Although your participation in this study presents no to minimal risks to you, be assured your participation in the study is entirely voluntary. You may choose not to participate without any adverse consequences. If you choose not to participate, please indicate such on the survey and return it to us. If you choose to participate, be confident all responses will be treated with confidentiality. Only group results will be reported, and your responses will never be matched with your name.

Again, we will be grateful to you for taking the 10 minutes needed to complete and return the survey! Your choice to complete the survey will provide valuable information with regard to potential needs in the growth and development of the school psychologists' role within the educational setting.

Thank you in advance for your help! Please feel free to contact me at (715) 232-1326 or [weisenburgj@uwstout.edu](mailto:weisenburgj@uwstout.edu) if you have any questions regarding this study.

Sincerely,

Jacalyn W. Weissenburger, Ph.D., Associate Professor  
409 McCalmont Hall, School of Education  
University of Wisconsin-Stout

Katie M. Panske, M.S.Ed.  
Principle Investigator

PS: Questions or concerns about this study should be addressed first to the research advisor, Jacalyn Weissenburger at (715) 232-1326 or [weisenburgj@uwstout.edu](mailto:weisenburgj@uwstout.edu), and second to:

Sue Foxwell, Human Protections Administrator  
UW-Stout Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects in Research  
11 Harvey Hall, Menomonie, WI 54751, (715) 232-1126

February, 2007

Dear Teacher:

In December, you were asked to complete a survey about the role and function of school psychologists. To the best of our knowledge, we have not yet received a completed survey from you. We realize that you may not have had time to fill out the survey in December. We are hoping you could take the time today to help us.

While your participation in this research is entirely voluntary, we hope that you will choose to participate in this study. Although much has been written regarding the role and function of school psychologists, little information has been solicited from teachers. It is important to gain information from the "front-line workers" in the field . . . people like you!

If you choose not to participate, please indicate such on the survey and return it to us. If you choose to participate, be assured that all responses will be treated with confidentiality. Only group results will be reported, and your responses will never be matched with your name.

We will be grateful to you for taking the 10 minutes needed to complete and return the survey. If you choose to participate and would like to be entered in a raffle drawing, please email your name and address to [weissenburgj@uwstout.edu](mailto:weissenburgj@uwstout.edu). One winner will receive a \$30.00 gift certificate for Amazon.com.

Thank you in advance for your help! Please feel free to call me at 715-232-1326 if you have any questions regarding this study.

Sincerely,

Jacalyn W. Weissenburger, Ph.D., Associate Professor  
School of Education  
University of Wisconsin-Stout

Katie M. Panske, MS.Ed.  
School Psychologist

**Informed Consent:**

I understand that by completing this questionnaire. I am giving my informed consent as a participant in this study. I understand that the basic nature of the study and agree that any potential risks are exceedingly small. I also understand that the potential benefits that might be realized from the successful completion of this study. I am aware of that the information is being sought in a specific manner so that only minimal identifiers are necessary and so that confidentiality is guaranteed. I realize that I have the right to refuse my participation at any time during the study. Additionally, I understand that the results of the study will only be reported on a group basis. Questions or concerns about participation in the study should be addressed first to the researcher, Jacalyn Weissenburger, and second to:

Sue Foxwell, Human Protections Administrator

UW-Stout Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects in Research  
11 Harvey Hall, Menomonie, Wisconsin 54751, 715-232-1126

This is a three-page survey, beginning on the backside of this letter.

## Teachers' Perceptions of the Role of the School Psychologist

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**I. In my experience, the school psychologist in my school(s) engages in the following activities (check all that apply):**

- Evaluates students for special education eligibility \_\_\_\_\_
- Assesses English Language Learners (ELL) \_\_\_\_\_
- Provides individual counseling services \_\_\_\_\_
- Provides group counseling services \_\_\_\_\_
- Provides social skills training \_\_\_\_\_
- Consults with teachers \_\_\_\_\_
- Consults with parents \_\_\_\_\_
- Consults with administrators \_\_\_\_\_
- Conducts Functional Behavioral Assessments (FBAs) \_\_\_\_\_
- Develops/implements Behavioral Intervention Plans (BIPs) \_\_\_\_\_
- Develops Individual Education Plan (IEP) goals \_\_\_\_\_
- Participates on pre-referral teams \_\_\_\_\_
- Develop/designs academic interventions \_\_\_\_\_
- Provides staff training/inservice activities \_\_\_\_\_
- Develops curriculum \_\_\_\_\_
- "Case manages" students with IEPs \_\_\_\_\_
- "Case manages" students with 504 plans \_\_\_\_\_
- Participates on school committees/teams \_\_\_\_\_
- Provides crisis intervention services \_\_\_\_\_
- Screens students for mental health concerns \_\_\_\_\_
- Conducts home visits \_\_\_\_\_
- Refers students/families to outside agencies \_\_\_\_\_
- Evaluates the effectiveness of academic programs \_\_\_\_\_
- Evaluates the effectiveness of behavioral programs \_\_\_\_\_
- Attends professional conferences \_\_\_\_\_
- Conducts research \_\_\_\_\_
- Attends extracurricular events \_\_\_\_\_
- Completes paperwork/writes reports \_\_\_\_\_
- List other activities: \_\_\_\_\_

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**II. Using a 1 to 5 scale, rate how important you believe it is that your school psychologist participates in the following activities (regardless of whether or not he or she engages in that function).**

<b>1</b> <b>Not</b> <b>important</b>	<b>2</b> <b>Not very</b> <b>important</b>	<b>3</b> <b>Neutral/undecided</b>	<b>4</b> <b>Somewhat</b> <b>important</b>	<b>5</b> <b>Highly</b> <b>important</b>
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Evaluates students for special education eligibility	_____
Assesses English Language Learners (ELL)	_____
Provides individual counseling services	_____
Provides group counseling services	_____
Provides social skills training	_____
Consults with teachers	_____
Consults with parents	_____
Consults with administrators	_____
Conducts Functional Behavioral Assessments (FBAs)	_____
Develops/implements Behavioral Intervention Plans (BIPs)	_____
Develops Individual Education Plan (IEP) goals	_____
Participates on pre-referral teams	_____
Develop/designs academic interventions	_____
Provides staff training/in-service activities	_____
Develops curriculum	_____
"Case manages" students with IEPs	_____
"Case manages" students with 504 plans	_____
Participates on school committees/teams	_____
Provides crisis intervention services	_____
Screens students for mental health concerns	_____
Conducts home visits	_____
Refers students/families to outside agencies	_____
Evaluates the effectiveness of academic programs	_____
Evaluates the effectiveness of behavioral programs	_____
Attends professional conferences	_____
Conducts research	_____
Attends extracurricular events	_____
Completes paperwork/writes reports	_____
List other activities:	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____

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***Please respond to the demographic items on the back of this page (remember, only group results will be reported!)***

**III. Demographic Information:**

~Gender: ☐ Male ☐ Female

~Age: \_\_\_\_ years old

~Ethnicity: ☐ White/Caucasian ☐ Black/African American  
☐ Asian American ☐ Pacific Islander  
☐ Native American ☐ Hispanic/Latino  
☐ Other \_\_\_\_\_

~Number of years as a teacher: \_\_\_\_\_ years

~Highest degree held: ☐ B.A./B.S. ☐ M.S. ☐ M.S.+12 credits ☐ M.S.+32 credits  
☐ Ed.S. ☐ Ph.D. or Ed.D.  
☐ Other: \_\_\_\_\_

~University and state of teacher training: \_\_\_\_\_

~Employment status: ☐ full time ☐ part time

~Position held: ☐ general education teacher ☐ special education teacher

~Number of hours the school psychologist is assigned to your school:  
☐ 1-10 hours ☐ 11-20 hours ☐ 21-30 hours ☐ 31-40 hours

~Are you a member of any of the following professional organizations?

☐ Your state's teacher association  
☐ NEA ☐ AFT  
☐ Other \_\_\_\_\_

~Subject/grade level: \_\_\_\_\_

~Please characterize the type of school district in which you work:

☐ Rural  
☐ Suburban  
☐ Urban

~In what state do you teach? \_\_\_\_\_

~Please list additional support staff available in your school (i.e., social worker, school counselor, school nurse, etc.)

Support Staff Title:

Approximate hours in the school building:

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

**THANK YOU!!!!**



## Appendix B: Question one result tables

Table B1

*Top Four Activities Engaged in by School Psychologists (N = 141)*

Activities	Percentage of respondents
Consult with administration	88%
Consult with teachers	86%
Consult with parents	84%
Evaluate special education eligibility	83%

Table B2

*Most Important School Psychology Activities (Likert Ratings from 1 to 5)*

*(N = 137)*

Activities	Mean rating
Consult with teachers	4.84
Consult with parents	4.82
Consult with administration	4.72
Evaluate for special education eligibility	4.58

Table B3

*Bottom Six Activities Engaged in by School Psychologists (N = 141)*

Activities	Percentage of respondents
Extracurricular events	29%
Social skills training	29%
Research	22%
Evaluate academic program effectiveness	20%
English language learners	18%
Develop Curriculum	6%

Table B4

*Least Important School Psychology Activities (Likert Ratings from 1 to 5)*

*(N = 137)*

Activities	Mean rating
Social Skills Training	3.57
English language learners	3.14
Research	3.08
Evaluate academic program effectiveness	2.88
Extracurricular events	2.58
Develop Curriculum	2.43

## Appendix C: Question three result tables

Table C5

*Top Four Activities Engaged in by School Psychologists by State (N = 141)*

Activities	Wisconsin (n = 81)	Iowa (n = 60)
Consult with administration	91%	83%
Consult with teachers	90%	80%
Consult with parents	91%	75%
Evaluate for special education eligibility	89%	75%

Table C6

*Bottom Four Activities Engaged in by School Psychologists by State (N = 141)*

Activities	Wisconsin (n = 81)	Iowa (n = 60)
Research	26%	17%
English language learners	23%	12%
Evaluate effectiveness of academic program	19%	22%
Develop curriculum	4%	8%

Table C7

*Most Important Activities by State (Likert Ratings from 1 to 5)*

Activities	Wisconsin ( <i>n</i> = 78)	Iowa ( <i>n</i> = 59)
Consult with teachers	4.84	4.83
Consult with parents	4.88	4.73
Consult with administration	4.73	4.70

Table C8

*Least Important Activities by State (Likert Ratings from 1 to 5)*

Activities	Wisconsin ( <i>n</i> = 78)	Iowa ( <i>n</i> = 59)
English language learners	3.25	3.00
Research	2.94	3.27
Evaluate academic program effectiveness	2.79	3.00
Extracurricular events	2.70	2.42
Develop curriculum	2.42	2.45

Table C9

*Significant Differences by State (Pearson Chi-Square Results)*

Activity	<i>n</i>	<i>df</i>	$\chi^2$	<i>p</i> value
Evaluate for special education eligibility	141	1	4.71	.030
Consulting with parents	141	1	7.00	.008
Committee/ team member	141	1	7.04	.008
Crisis intervention	141	1	6.53	.011
Referrals	141	1	7.28	.007
Attending professional conferences	141	1	8.82	.003
Paperwork/ write reports	141	1	7.16	.007

## Appendix D: Demographic Table

Table D10

*Respondent Characteristics (N = 141)*

Demographic	n	Percentages
Gender		
Male	34	24%
Female	107	76%
Ethnicity		
White/ Caucasian	139	99%
Other	1	.1%
Degree		
Bachelors	63	45%
Masters	25	18%
Masters +12	19	14%
Masters +32	30	21%
Employment Status		
Fulltime	139	99%
Teaching Position		
Special Education	22	16%
General Education	118	84%
State		
Iowa	60	43%
Wisconsin	81	57%
School District		
Rural	64	45%
Suburban	40	28%
Urban	35	25%

